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AUTHOR	Madkins, Jerry B.; Mitchell, Charles E.
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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on data from a previous study to explore the existence of institutional racism at traditionally all-white institutions and the steps that an institution can take to address the possible hostile environment of a nearly all-white institution. Data on college mathematics and core curriculum achievement from the earlier study showed differences in performance favoring Caucasian students over African American and Hispanic American students. Faculty members at the institution studied suggested that minority students were less well prepared or that they did not really care about their studies. Students believed that they were negatively stereotyped by their instructors and by the institution as a whole. In addition, minority students seldom have a place off campus where they can relax and escape academic pressure. Administrators must insure that instructors and student leaders on campus are aware that adjusting to campus life can be harder for some minority students. The obstacles that minority students face can easily form a barrier that students will not overcome. Aggressively recruiting students to a predominantly Anglo campus may be an injustice unless the institution supports their success aggressively. (SLD)

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ESTABLISHING A "LEVEL PLAYING FIELD" FOR MINORITY STUDENTS ON PREDOMINANTLY ANGLO UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES

DR. JERRY B. MADKINS

&

DR. CHARLES E. MITCHELL

TARLETON STATE UNIVERSITY

STEPHENVILLE, TEXAS

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Establishing A "Level Playing Field" For Minority Students on Predominantly Anglo University Campuses

Introduction

Traditionally all-white institutions have recognized the importance of recruiting a student population, which mirrors the statistical norms of our society. Furthermore, growing numbers of minority students are seeking a college education while corresponding figures suggest that these numbers are decreasing for Caucasian students (Carter and Wilson, 1997). The percentage of minority students who elect to enroll in historically all-white universities also continues to grow. To maintain or 'increase enrollment some universities will be forced to increase the population of minority students on campus. Toward these goals a variety of affirmative action and recruitment campaigns have been enacted which openly and aggressively attempt to attract students from minority populations. If students who represent minority or underrepresented segments of the population are being actively recruited, then it is

essential to know that an equitable opportunity for an education awaits them on campus. Could minority students from large inner city communities not familiar with a nearly all-white campus environment find special obstacles in their paths? Is it possible that a nearly all-white campus in itself can be seen as an environment hostile to the efforts of minority students? It will be the purpose of this manuscript to consider pertinent data based upon student interviews and survey that address the question of the existence of institutional racism at traditionally all-white institutions. The examinations of survey and interview data represents an extension of an initial investigation reported by Madkins and Mitchell in the 1999 National Conference Proceedings of the National Association of African-American Studies (pp. 763-774). We will further discuss steps that cm be taken by an institution to address the possible hostile environment of a nearly all-white institution and thus, better provide all students with an equitable opportunity for an education.

Performance Data Summaries

Statistics reported by Madkins and Mitchell (1999) regarding the performance of Caucasian, African-American and Hispanic-American students over a three-year period of time in two developmental (remedial) algebra courses in mathematics and the core curriculum course in College Algebra clearly suggested differences in performance favoring Caucasian students across the three populations (see Tables One and Two). The differences in performance are discussed in detail in the 1999 manuscript.

Table I
Performance Summaries in Basic Mathematics Courses

	Caucasian	African-American	Hispanic-American
Math 100			
'C" or better	57%	33%	62%
Avg Grade	1.63	.98	1.98
Math 101			
"C" or better	50%	34%	50%
Avg Grades	1.55	1.03	1.70
Math 107			
"C " or better	61.5%	36.5%	45.5%
Avg Grades	1.97	1.27	1.52
1995/1996	52%	32%	46.5%

a) Data collected from Fall Semester 1995 to Spring Semester 1998

b) The data represents all n2inority students, but only a random sampling of Caucasian students.

c) Student scored a 'IC" or higher in the course

d) If a student repeated a course, only the grade from the first attempt was averaged.

e) The percent of students who began their work in mathematics from Fall 1995 through Fall 1996 who successfully completed general studies mathematics requirements by Spring 1998.

The data in Table One represents a statistical sampling of the students enrolled in these courses. Table Two represents a comprehensive summary of all students by ethnicity for the Fall Semester 1998.

Table 2
Passing Rates by Ethnicity for fail 1998

	Math 100	Math 101	Math 107
African-American			
Passing	44%	55%	38%
Not Passing	56%	45%	62%
Hispanic			
Passing	58%	79%	48%
Not Passing	42%	21%	52%
Caucasian			
Passing	70%	65%	58%
Not Passing	30%	35%	42%

In a meeting with faculty in the department in question, some faculty members attempted to justify the poor performance of minority students. It was suggested that minority students were more poorly prepared for the courses than Caucasian students. Because all students in the department are initially placed based upon standardized test scores when available this explanation would seem to be unsatisfactory. Some faculty in the department further raised stereotypes of minority students as people who did not sufficiently care about their academic subjects citing a failure of the students to seek tutorial assistance as a basis for this explanation. Some members of the faculty adamantly stated that announcements were made to classes openly assuring the students that help was available for all who were interested. The belief that many of these students attend college merely to participate in athletics was also cited. Sadly, it has been the response of many educators to statistics like these that the students themselves deserve to be blamed (Olson and Olson, 1991).

In interviews and surveys, many of the minority students acknowledged the fact that faculty usually made

announcements Pertaining to the existence of tutorial or special assistance opportunities. However, some of the students stated that they had heard the offers before and believed that there was one meaning for white students and a different meaning for black students. Some students reported being openly asked which sport they were involved in and others simply doubted the sincerity of the offer. In one way or another, many students believed that they were negatively stereotyped by their instructors.

Numerous investigations into the potential impact of stereotyping students suggest that students' classroom performances can be undermined when students are stereotyped based upon race (Steele and Aronson, 1995; Steele, 1997; Aronson, Quinn and Spencer, 1998; Aronson, Lustina, Good, Keough, Steele and Brown, 1999). According to Aronson, et al., (1999) "It is sufficient to be identified enough with a domain to be threatened by the possibility of limited prospects there and unlucky enough to be on the wrong end of a stereotype about an intellectual ability." These researchers go on to state that based upon their experiences, students targeted with stereotypical

threats are simply responding to low or demeaning expectations. In some cases, minority students may face something much worse than remainders of the stereotypes. According to Reyes (1991), it is quite possible that people raised in a racist society may harbor subconscious beliefs that can be overly expressed in a classroom.

Institutional Racism

In simplest terms, EEO means freedom from discrimination and prejudice because of one's color, race, sex, national origin, religion, or creed. There are basically two forms of discrimination: Institutional discrimination (ID) and non-institutional discrimination (NID). The ID form occurs when "institutions" that are well-established practice discriminatory acts toward employees. Many times this form of discrimination is very subtle and permeates an entire organization from top to bottom. NID normally presents itself from an individual or small groups of individuals regardless of what the atmosphere or policies may be in the parent organization. It is generally accepted that ID is much more damaging than NID. Some would

argue ID is more damaging than NID because it is so subtle and is difficult to prove. It is appropriate at this time to list some of the ways in which ID and NID may occur. This could result in the denial of a job through any of, or combination of, the following factors:

a) Race/color

b) National origin/creed

c) Marital/pregnancy status

d) Physical condition (disability, height, weight, etc.)

e) Religion

f) Age

g) Appearance/dress/speech

h) Litigation problems (arrests, convictions, jail time)

i) Education/work experience (or lack of)

Unfortunately, the perception of some minority students that they are being stereotyped extends beyond the classrooms to the campus in general. Students reported that an effort to become involved in campus activities by joining clubs or organizations only meant additional problems in adjustment to the campus. To be the only African-American student at a meeting at the very least

resulted in having other students stare. Minority students sometimes reported being asked questions which were directly or indirectly intended to discover why the student attended, as if an interest in the club or organization was not a sufficient explanation. Being stereotyped as athletes was even more common outside of the classroom and students indicated that it was not unusual for a Caucasian student to begin a conversation with the question "What sport do you play?"

If the institution is located within a city with a small percentage of African-Americans in the permanent population the problems are compounded. Movie theaters, nightclubs and entertainment activities rarely represent mainstream interests to minority students. In other words, these students have no place off campus where thy can relax and escape academic pressures.

Adjusting to Campus Life

Adjusting to a predominantly Anglo university campus may be a challenge for many minority students, and particularly those whose experiences with such a

campus are limited. The first step in the process may be to inform students of what they will face and advise students of counseling services designed to help students cope with the adjustment Minority students should be informed that they might be stereotyped as athletes by other students and even faculty. Of course, faculty should be enlightened to the fact that many of the minority students are not involved in athletics. Minority students should be informed that Caucasian students might find it difficult to understand why they would choose a predominantly white college and that they may be a natural curiosity as to the reasons for the decision to attend.

An important factor in the adjustment process will be the leadership role played not only by administrators, but also by student leaders on campus as well. At the institution in question the president of the university addressed a task force on inclusion and equity by stating that there were only two or three incidents involving racism in the past few years. Administrators who measure the campus atmosphere by counting only blatant incidents involving bias and racism must become more sensitive to

the idea that subtle forms of racism, such as flying the Confederate battle flag, can be just as damaging. Student leaders on campus and instructors may need to make overt efforts to make sure that minority students understand that their involvement and participation are welcome.

Administrators must insure that instructors and student leaders on campus are aware that adjusting to campus life may be more of a challenge for some minority students than for students in the general population. For example, in the mathematics department in question it was clear that many instructors were not aware of the importance of addressing multicultural differences and certainly would have had no idea how to begin to do so if asked. Workshops involving, issues such as addressing multicultural differences and the impact of negative stereotyping of students would be a good starting point.

Instructors and university staff must become more aware that the first week or two of classes may be the most crucial time. Adams (1991) presents a model for social interaction which addresses many of the situations in which questions may arise for minority students both in their

interaction with faculty and other students. Many of these questions can be anticipated and easily addressed by instructors and counselors during orientation or on the first day of classes. Additionally, supporting student efforts to get off to a positive beginning academically may be accomplished by special tutorial labs, housed in the Office of Multicultural Services, but open to all students.

Conclusion

The obstacles that many minority students face when entering a predominantly Anglo university can easily form a barrier which students will not overcome. In one sense, increasing the percentage of minority students on campus can eliminate many of these obstacles. Unfortunately, the statistics produced by the department of mathematics which are represented in the tables above may suggest the existence of a revolving door in which these students are asked to exit the university soon after they are admitted. Aggressively recruiting minority students to a predominantly Anglo institution may be an injustice to these students unless the institution aggressively supports

the success of these students after they have been successfully recruited.

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